Plans Include Regional Focus

Author Faulk Tries MSU Press Rescue

By PAUL VANCIL
Press-Scimitar Staff Writer

WITH A SLIGHT stretch of the imagination it could be a scene from a Western. Hard times have hit. The cattle are thin, the bank is getting worried and it looks like the ranch is headed for the auction block. Then, out of the southwest, rides the man who might just save the homestead.

The scene sounds like it could come from one of Dr. Odie Faulk's books, judging by some of the titles. In this story, though, Faulk himself is the hero, and the "ranch" is Memphis State University Press, of which Faulk is the new director.

DR. ODIE FAULK

The Western analogy is not all that unlikely. Faulk comes to MSU Press after a year as book publications director at the Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City. He is the author of a long list of non-fiction books on Southwestern American history, including such titles as *Tom Green: A Fightin' Texan, Dodge City: The Most Western Town of All,* and *The Geronimo Campaign.* His work has been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize three times.

And he has some plans for changes at MSU Press.

"I do not want to publish narrow books only of interest to a few people," says Faulk, 45. "I would like to publish authors who can make our people and culture understandable to the rest of the world."

Faulk says he wants to focus the MSU Press catalogue on the Mid-South. Success in university publishing is often tied to such a focus, he says, and success in recent years has not come easy to college presses.

"We have a choice of being a fifth-rate national publisher or a first-class regional publisher. I'd opt for first-class," he says.

But regionalism does not imply parochialism, according to the new director.

"We need not be narrow to serve our region," Faulk says. "We can use standards of international scholarship and apply them to our region."

Wants 'Reminiscences'

Faulk envisions several series of books on various aspects of the Mid-South — on the state's counties, environment, natural sciences, culture and history. He would like a series of "reminiscences" books from or about such types as teachers or country doctors.

Already in motion is a series on "great American builders." The first in the series, planned for release late next year, is a biography of Roy Hofheinz, the politician and developer from Houston. The book is by Ed Ray, former associate editor of *The Press-Scimitar.*

Faulk comes by his interest in regions honestly. As a historian at several univerities — primarily the University of Oklahoma — Faulk has always "been fascinated by the region in which I live." Since he has mostly lived in the Texas, Arizona and Oklahoma, the Southwest has been his special interest and the more than 30 books he has written, co-authored and edited since 1963 reflect it.

Faulk met Billy M. Jones when they were both graduate students at Texas Tech University, from which Faulk holds both his master's and doctorate in history. Jones eventually became MSU's president; this summer, he brought Faulk to MSU Press.

The new director calls his regional focus an "intensification" of previous efforts by MSU Press, but his characterization may be generous. The fall 1978 catalogue contains two new offerings and five recently published works, but only two of the seven can be considered regional in a broad sense. Among the titles: *Morality and the Good Life: A Commentary on Aristotle's 'Nicomachean Ethics'* and *Vision of the Voyage: Hart Crane and the Psychology of Romanticism.*

'Expert Knowledge' Image

Such intellectual tomes illustrate one of the major problems university presses have faced in the 1970s. Faulk says they were conceived as publishers of "expert knowledge" and — depending on which schools ran them — they either were self-supporting or lived on university subsidy. Beginning in the 1930s, he says, university presses started to expand and compete in bookstores. Then came the 1970s and tough economic times.

"University presses had to change and try to reach the general public," Faulk says. "They've had to rethink their role. If they publish only scholarly books, they die; if they publish only popular books, they don't deserve the university imprint. You walk a narrow line. The result is most presses balance their lists."

That is Faulk's plan at MSU. In the past, he says, MSU Press "has not reached out as it might have" to publish "books more oriented to the public taste." He will try, he says.

Faulk also intends to expand his catalogue. He hopes to increase new offerings to about 20 a year. He says 40 to 50 percent will be by MSU faculty ("We also exist to extend the image of our faculty") and about 75 percent will be regional.

Another new emphasis will be more aggressive marketing, but "with some dignity."